

## Marcus D. Brown Funeral Home

While other kids wanted to be firefighters or NBA stars, or maybe even doctors or lawyers when they grew up, Marcus Brown was a little different: He wanted to be a funeral director. It was a strange calling, to be sure, and one that had no precedent – Marcus’s family had never been involved in the funeral business – but it was a calling Marcus heard loud and clear. By four years old, he was giving proper burials to dead stray animals. On the family trips to Athens, Ga., when they passed the Brown’s Funeral Home on the way, Marcus would say, “That’s going to be me someday.” By 1987, while he was still in high school, Marcus took his first job with a funeral home, and he’s never worked outside of the funeral industry since.

After 16 years in the business, Marcus decided to fulfill his lifelong dream and become the director of his own funeral home. He worked with Jill Burroughs, Area Manager of the Clemson Regional Small Business Development Center to develop a business plan. Marcus also began advertising his services up to four times a week in both print and radio, directing would-be customers to his present place of employment, so that when his own funeral home opened, it would have a built-in loyal customer base.

Jill also connected Marcus with Appalachian Development Corporation (ADC) in upstate South Carolina. In 2003, Marcus received an SBA 504 loan from ADC to literally build his funeral home from the ground up. The SBA 504 loan guaranty program, also known as a certified development corporation loan program, is an invaluable economic development tool that enables small firms to create and retain jobs. It provides growing businesses with long-term, fixed-rate financing for major assets such as land, equipment and, of course, constructing buildings.

By October 2003, Marcus D. Brown Funeral Home was open for business.

One of the reasons Marcus selected his funeral home’s location was for its open space. The funeral home boasts a large parking lot, a feature often lacking in black funeral homes. The chapel, which seats 300, is the largest out of the black funeral homes in the area; he had wanted a large chapel to accommodate a desire for chapel services in lieu of church services and the travel they entail. And Marcus still has plenty of land left over to accommodate his goal to expand and build more private viewing rooms and a larger embalming room.

Marcus oversees every aspect of his business. His ten employees include clergy, a musician and several funeral directors.

“It’s challenging because I know when it boiled down to it, I was responsible for every dollar,” he says.

Despite the challenges Marcus faces owning a small business, “it’s still nice to know it’s mine.”



***An SBA South Carolina District Office success story***